



Natural Resources Conservation Service
375 Jackson Street, Suite 600
Saint Paul, MN 55101

**State Technical Committee Meeting
August 13, 2008
Stearns County Public Works, St. Cloud, MN**

William Hunt, MN NRCS State Conservationist opened up the State Technical Committee (STC) meeting at 9:32 a.m.

Hunt reviewed the agenda. No additions were offered by STC to the agenda presented. Hunt expressed his appreciation for what the conservation partners in Minnesota have accomplished in 2008. Very little could have been accomplished without their support and assistance.

Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) Overview by Tim Koehler, NRCS

Tim Koehler, Assistant State Conservationist-Programs shared a Farm Bill power point presentation which provided a synopsis of the 2008 Farm Bill. Koehler's presentation highlighted the various NRCS programs that will be administered by NRCS. The Farm Bill presentation has been placed on the MN NRCS webpage. Koehler and Hunt reminded those in attendance that the USDA agency rules and regulations have not been written for the Farm Bill. There will be opportunities to comment on the rules, once written.

Koehler's 2008 Farm Bill power point presentation has been posted on the MN NRCS website. Click in on the following weblink:

<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/powerpoint.html#Farm%20Bill%202008>

Conservation Reserve Program by Greg Anderson, FSA

Greg Anderson, Agricultural Program Specialist

Anderson reported that FSA will be holding National Farm Bill training in September. Statewide training for FSA in Minnesota will occur in October with possible Partner training to be held in October, 2008.

Anderson highlighted some of the Farm Bill Highlights for FSA. Please refer to the following FSA website for additional 2008 Farm Bill summaries. www.fsa.usda.gov

CRP Critical Feed use provisions was announced on May 27, 2008. A Federal Judge issued a Temporary Restraining order on July 8, 2008. However, on July 24, 2008 a permanent injunction was issued in certain feed use categories. 3 feed use categories were included in the injunction. 968,539 acres (Estimated 1-2% of CRP) acres in MN might utilize the Critical Feed provisions.



As requested from a recent STC meeting, Anderson provided some numerical data on CRP.

1.77 million acres of CRP land currently enrolled in MN.
390,160 acres will expire on 9/30/08 (77% REX re-enrolled or extended).
260,866 acres will expire on 9/30/09 (78% REX re-enrolled or extended).
75,587 acres will expire on 9/30/10 (59% REX re-enrolled or extended).

****However, please note some of these acres were also involved in the REX – Re-enrollment and Extension of CRP contract acres.**

Minnesota ranks 3rd in the nation for CCRP and CREP with 62,743 contracts.

MN SAFE (State Acres For wildlife Enhancement) program has 10,000 acres offered/approved to date. For more information about CRP, please check out the FSA website at: www.fsa.usda.gov This website contains detailed CRP reports.

On July 10, 2008 a CRP Subcommittee Teleconference was held to review and discuss CRP Mid-Contract Management (MCM) Options. The results of this Subcommittee were shared as a handout at the STC meeting on August 13, 2008. The recommendations will be presented to the State FSA Committee.

It was moved by Kevin Lines and seconded by Jim Kukowski that the CRP Subcommittee report be accepted with minor exceptions as noted. Bullet Number 3 on the first page of the handout was not unanimously supported by the STC and Bulletin Number 2 on the 2nd page of the handout needs additional clarification regarding open water.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) by Tim Koehler, NRCS

Koehler shared the results of 2008 MN NRCS-EQIP allocation. A total of \$33,177,965 has been allocated/obligated to approximately 2,000 producer contracts in MN. To date, 114 Beginning Farmer Contracts obligating \$4.3 million to date (final \$ amount expected to be around \$5 million for a few additional beginning farmer contracts).

To date, 37 Limited Resource Farmer EQIP Contracts obligating \$1.07 million.

To date, 656 livestock related contracts obligating \$17.1 million which is approximately 52% of the total MN NRCS EQIP allocation.

14 contracts obligated greater than \$150,000 totaling \$3.2 million.

\$80,000 was obligated for tribal applications.

No New Immigrant Farmer applications received.

Koehler's handout depicted typical sample conservation practices that have been included in 2008 agricultural producer's EQIP contracts.

MN NRCS is proud of the accomplishments of the EQIP Beginning farmer or Rancher program said Hunt; original goal was \$500,000 however, the results have yielded \$5,000,000. The average size of the 2,000 FY-2008 EQIP contracts in Minnesota is approximately \$15,000. Approximately \$465,000 designated to MN agricultural Flood Recovery efforts.

A concern was raised about more \$'s going to livestock farmers as the MN deadline to meet feedlot compliance is coming up in 2010. Koehler reminded the STC that nationally 60% of funds are to go to livestock resource concerns. In MN, EQIP in 2008 has allocated funding for 70 waste storage facilities. STC members are concerned about how MN farmers are going to meet the feedlot compliance deadline. EQIP alone cannot begin to meet the approximately \$400 million financial needs of producers to comply with state law. All EQIP eligible producers are encouraged to apply for cost-share at the local SWCD/Local Work Group level. Group discussion ensued on how this state environmental mandate and large funding need might be addressed by the state legislature.

Conservation Security Program (old CSP version I) – by Leah Duzy, NRCS

Duzy made a brief presentation on the CSP program. Duzy referred to the CSP Subcommittee update dated April 2008. Additional information regarding CSP is available at the following website: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/csp.html. Duzy noted local field offices did an excellent job of getting publicity out to the media about the Thief River watershed CSP approval in 2008. However, the results of the signup in 2008 resulted in only 10 new CSP contracts for a total of 19,084 acres.

The 2008 Farm Bill has renamed and modified the old Conservation Security Program to the Conservation Stewardship Program (as suggested by the MN STC AKA CSP version II). The new Conservation Stewardship Program does not have to be implemented on a watershed basis.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program – by Leah Duzy, NRCS

Duzy shared the WHIP fact sheet that Mark Oja, NRCS biologist had developed for the 2008 WHIP program. Minnesota received an allocation of \$1.355 million for FY-2008. To date, Minnesota has preliminarily approved contracts establishing and enhancing over 4,000 acres at a average cost share amount per contract of approximately \$1,000.

RIM/WRP by Tim Koehler, NRCS and Kevin Lines, BWSR

In 2008 the Minnesota Legislature approved \$25 million dollars for the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program. The application period began on June 26, 2008 and concluded on July 18, 2008. RIM was created in 1986 by the Minnesota Legislature. BWSR is responsible for administering the program. Lines stated that the MN RIM/WRP partnership program will result in MN having one of the premier Wetland restoration programs in the nation. The 3-week signup window resulted in almost 300 voluntary landowner applications requesting in over \$70 million in wetland acreage offered.

Approximately 82 to 84 of the highest quality applications have been selected for RIM/WRP contracts for a total of 10,000 acres. \$13.5 million anticipated from NRCS WRP and \$11 million from MN RIM. BWSR will be spending close to one half of their total bonding bill RIM allocation.

Action requested by State Technical Committee- Develop a state-wide map which depicts the historical wetlands and the wetlands that have been added as a result of RIM/WRP.

The next WRP Subcommittee will take place on August 18, 2008. Tim Koehler is the point of contact for this Subcommittee.

Hunt expressed his appreciation to the conservation partnership that played a significant role in RIM/WRP. This includes Ryan Heininger, DU; Matt Holland, PF; Judy Erickson, MASWCD; Kevin Lines, BWSR; and Tim Koehler, NRCS.

Upcoming events that may be of possible interest to STC members included:

An Invasive Species Conference will be held at Duluth (DECC), MN October 27-30, 2008. The MN SWCS chapter is playing a lead role in the planning of the conference in partnership with the Governor's MN Invasive Species Advisory Council. Additional information regarding this conference can be found at: www.minnesotaswcs.org

Watchable Wildlife –MN NRCS is working with TNC, Audubon, Watchable Wildlife, MN DNR, etc., seeking program initiatives, with willing producers, to enhance the public's Watchable Wildlife opportunities. There is excellent potential for the general public and all taxpayers to enjoy nature's wildlife, without trespassing and in a non-obtrusive way, from our many scenic vistas and open land and water areas in Minnesota.

TSP training courses are being offered by Minnesota Extension. Contact person for additional information is Les Everett. Les can be reached at (612) 625 6751.

Hunt also thanked the STC members for attending the meeting on August 13th in St. Cloud.

Meeting adjourned at 2:55 pm.

